



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MEDIA RELEASE

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Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage

Report highlights need to support private conservation

Current federal and state policy settings are failing farmers and other landholders interested in undertaking conservation measures for the public good, according to a report released today by the House of Representatives Environment Committee.

The bipartisan, 217-page report of the *Inquiry into the effects on landholders and farmers of public good conservation measures imposed by Australian Governments* makes 20 recommendations for policy initiatives to redress the situation and help achieve long-term land-use sustainability.

The recommendations combine with those in the Committee's previous report, *Coordinating Catchment Management* (February 2001), to form a blueprint for future land-use management in Australia.

"Australia is facing an environmental crisis, and landholders need assistance in responding to the challenge," said the Hon Ian Causley MP, Chair of the House Environment Committee.

"All landholders will have to significantly change the way they manage land, with a transition to more sustainable natural systems management. Present policy approaches, however, are not effective in assisting this; they do not concentrate enough on obtaining outcomes and are often out of touch with the realities of rural and regional Australia."

Mr Causley said it was clear that landholders want to do the right thing by their land, but there are two major issues which require resolution: financial incentives and property rights. The report addresses these.

"Current taxation and financial arrangements do not effectively promote the development of public good conservation activities," Mr Causley said. "Very often landholders have to meet significant costs out of their own pockets for conservation works from which they can anticipate little immediate or even medium term benefit. The benefits flow to the community, but the cost is borne by the landholder. We tackle this problem in the report.

"Additionally, some landholders are angry at the erosion of what they believed to be their property rights and the imposition of land management controls in the absence of financial assistance. We also tackle this issue."

Mr Causley said the present environmental problems could be turned into enormous opportunities if the nation adopted a systemic, comprehensive approach. "The world is crying out for new, clean 'green' products and industries based on the ecologically sustainable use of land. We should not see the cost of public good conservation as a 'deadweight' cost, but rather as an opportunity to create sustainable jobs and industries, and revitalise rural and regional Australia."

Key recommendations: The committee found that there was a need for

- Transition assistance for adoption of ecologically sustainable land management practices;
- Financial assistance for the management of protected habitat and compensation where a property is no longer viable due to changes in land management laws;
- Clarification of a landholder's 'duty of care' and assistance in meeting it where it is beyond a landholder's capacity to do so;
- Creating a linkage between access to taxation concessions and ecologically sustainable use of Australia's land;
- Increased taxation incentives and deductions for ecologically sustainable use of Australia's land, including incentives for non-landholders; and
- Creation of various funding, research and development agencies and a revolving fund to promote public good conservation and the development of ecologically sustainable industries.

The report is available on the Committee's web site: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/environ/

For more detail, contact the House Environment Committee Secretariat on 02 6277 4500

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